

Book Reviews

The Politics of Migration in Italy: Perspectives on Local Debates and Party Competition



Pietro Castelli Gattinara

Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2016, 214 pp.

In recent years, scholars have increasingly recognized the salience of immigration in local politics. Castelli Gattinara's insightful book provides a comparative investigation of the politicization of migration across settings and time. The innovative contribution of the *Politics of Migration in Italy* is that it adopts a multi-dimensional approach to investigate the complex nature of a policy issue like immigration. Gattinara argues that discussing immigration policy at large gives only a superficial account of electoral campaigning, because political conflicts unfold over multiple dimensions of migration. He identifies three distinct dimensions: socio-economic, cultural and religious, and law and order.

Methodologically, this is an empirical study of the nature of immigration as a policy issue across six local electoral campaigns in three Italian cities: Rome, Milan, and Prato. In each locality, two electoral periods are examined. Electoral material, pledges, party manifestos, and news media coverage of immigration in selected local and national newspapers during electoral campaigns are analyzed.

The book addresses immigration debates from three inter-related angles: to what extent local factors and characteristics of electoral campaigns influence framing and dimensional choices in politicizing immigration; whether political actors develop strategies of competition based on dimensions or immigration as a whole; and the role of mass media in the construction of electoral agendas.

Generally, the findings indicate that the overall salience of immigration issues in political campaigns has increased over time in Italy, and more importantly that political actors do not differ from one another in whether they discuss immigration, but rather on how they discuss it.

Local characteristics, specifically the interaction between native and immigrant populations, influence the nature of the debates and the salience of different dimensions. Across the six campaigns, electoral debates on migration make references to law and order. However, while security debates are

predominant in Rome, socio-economic ones have relatively more resonance in Prato, and cultural and religious ones are more important in Milan than in other cities. Milan's foreign Islamic population paves the way to developing debates on the cultural and religious integration of migrants in the public sphere. In Prato, where the impact of the penetration of the Chinese economy is deeply felt, campaigns discuss migration primarily in terms of its economic dimensions. Rome hosts the largest Romanian and Roma community in Italy, and this provides fertile ground for securitized immigration debates.

The study also suggests that the immigration issue should not be conceived as homogenous but as a multi-faceted bundle of different aspects that are mobilized independently from one another. The thematic nature of this complex policy issue gives political actors the opportunity to develop strategies of competition based on dimensions rather than immigration as a whole, and to selectively address certain aspects (most notably security and perceived insecurity) while ignoring others (economic, and less so, cultural impact). A left-right pattern in immigration debates emerges whereby right-wing actors, who tend to be more consistently anti-immigration, use different dimensions interchangeably, whereas left-wing actors use certain dimensions (mainly the cultural one) to support migration, and others (law and order dimensions) to oppose it.

Castelli Gattinara compares party manifestos and news media reports on immigration to examine the ways in which parties refer to immigration in their ideal agenda and in the news media. Centre-right actors appear to engage in migration politics more frequently in electoral rhetoric than in party manifestos, whereas other actors have more balanced profiles. This may be due to the advantage that mainstream right-wing actors enjoy in migration debates.

Overall, *The Politics of Migration in Italy* is a thorough empirical investigation of the politicization of (im)migration as a salient political issue in electoral campaigns within the

complex landscape of Italian local party politics. The book is ambitious in its analysis of the changing nature of these campaigns, their contents and workings, as well as the social strategies implemented by political actors.

The study suggests that context, campaign, and local party conditions jointly drive the politicization of migration. Researchers interested in studying the politicization of migration will need to consider how national political dynamics influence local discourse and vice-versa, and the role that social media, increasingly significant in the everyday, plays in electoral campaigns.

The book contributes to the migration literature by showing that an analysis of immigration as a whole is inadequate to understand its politicization and suggesting that a more fruitful approach is the examination of multiple dimensions and how they are made salient or marginal at different times.

Castelli Gattinara's empirical investigation also contributes to scholarship on politics and electoral campaigning by showing that competitive factors within an issue matter more than competition over issues.

While the book advances our understanding of the politics of migration in general, it does less so on the politicization of forced migration in the contemporary world, an issue that is significant for the readers of *Refuge*. The focus on (im)migration as a prototypical policy issue means that the concept of (im)migration is left unpacked, and discourses about refugees and asylum seekers are missing, rendering their position invisible as a policy and scholarly issue.

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The Politicisation of Migration



Edited by Wouter van der Brug, Gianni D'Amato, Didier Ruedin, and Joost Berkhout
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The Politicisation of Migration is an effort to grapple with how political issues emerge and develop, especially immigration into Europe (the volume is actually about immigration, from asylum seekers to those classified as “coloured” in the United Kingdom). The collection of essays draws together conclusions derived from a European grant investigating how public opinion becomes public policy in different EU member states. In this regard, it is important to note that it is not an edited volume in the traditional sense, i.e., a volume that offers a spectrum of scholarly opinion on a topic. Rather, *The Politicisation of Migration* is a report on a research project with multiple contributors. This explains why the introduction is written as if the editors wrote each and every chapter, and it explains why chapter 2 indicates the methodology deployed throughout.

The study positions itself at the empirical end of comparative migration studies and seeks to examine politicization in former colonial countries with long histories of immigration (since the 1960s), namely the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Belgium. The study also concerns itself with two countries with guest workers but “without a colonial past” (20), namely Austria and Switzerland, and two new immigrant hosts, Spain and Ireland. Elisions occur even here—though airbrushing is required to erase Austria's imperial past—in an effort to frame the topic as the study of the politicization of new immigration in a variety of member

states. “Integration” is also a target of the research, and it is also worth noting that the data used in this study comprise claims made in mainstream newspaper articles. There is a technical section at the end of the book justifying this approach.

Chapter 3 discussed the politicization of immigration in Austria by analyzing the *Kronen Zeitung* tabloid and the left-leaning *Der Standard*. Over a fifteen-year period, according to the authors, the salience of immigration as a political issue increased in Austria, though discussions and claims were dominated by mainstream voices (apparently a “top-down” phenomenon). Chapter 4 discusses the politicization of immigration in Belgium. Of course, the authors have an especially interesting challenge here, considering Belgium's political and linguistic lines. The authors show that there are considerable differences between French-speaking Belgium, where immigration was not especially politicized, and Flanders, where immigration is becoming increasingly salient. The role of anti-immigration parties is notable in the latter context, as is the role of migrant advocacy, but there is a sense that the centre has dominated the extremes in Belgium. Chapter 5 provides a summary of demographic and legislative changes in Ireland, focusing especially on asylum seekers, but absent a discussion of the Common Travel Area with Great Britain. The author comments on the undifferentiated positions of the major political parties on immigration from